

Bob Gammage, former member of Legislature's 'Dirty 30', dies

By Joe Holly – Houston Chronicle

Monday, September 10, 2012 | Updated: Monday, September 10, 2012 11:15pm

Bob Gammage, 74, a reform-minded Democrat who served as a Texas legislator, congressman and state Supreme Court justice and who was a proud member of the fabled "Dirty 30" during his days in the Legislature, died Monday of a heart attack at his home in Llano.

The Dirty 30 was an ad-hoc coalition of Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, who rose up in opposition in 1971 to the high-handed rule of then-House Speaker Gus Mutscher, who soon would be enmeshed in the infamous Sharpstown stock scandal. The name came from a lobbyist in Mutscher's thrall who muttered, "Who are those dirty 30 bastards?"

"It was a badge of honor," said Kitty Allen, whose late husband, former state Rep. Joe Allen, also was a member of the group. "They wore it proudly."

Although Gammage and his Dirty 30 cohorts were outnumbered in the 150-member House, they refused to back down. Mutscher resigned the next year, and Texas voters cleaned house in the 1972 election.

"Not only was Bob a great legislator and a great senator, but he served with great distinction on the Supreme Court," said former Texas Gov. Mark White. "He had a great feel for people, and always tried to protect the little guy against powerful interests."

Graduated from Milby

Robert Alton Gammage was born in Houston on March 13, 1938. After graduating from Milby High School, he received his undergraduate degree from the University of Corpus Christi, now Texas A&M at Corpus Christi, in 1963, and his master's degree from Sam Houston State University in 1965. He received his law degree from the University of Texas at Austin in 1969 and a master's degree in law from the University of Virginia in 1986.

Gammage served with the U.S. Army Infantry Human Research and the Korea Military Advisory Group in 1959-60 and was a retired captain in the U.S. Naval Reserve.

A lawyer in private practice in Houston from 1969 to 1979, Gammage was elected to the Texas House in 1970 and the Texas Senate in 1973.

In the House he fought successfully to toughen Texas environmental protections and was an advocate of equal rights for women, voting rights for 18-year-olds and statewide single-member legislative districts. As a state senator he sponsored legislation designed to make Texas government more transparent and sponsored consumer protection and health care legislation.

Defeated by Paul

He served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1977 to 1979, and sponsored legislation that led to the creation of the Children's Nutrition Research Center at Texas Children's/St. Luke's Hospitals. He also sponsored legislation that preserved Ellington Field as the key federal facility for NASA's flight operations and crew training missions. He lost his bid for re-election after one term to Ron Paul.

He was elected judge on the Texas Court of Appeals in 1982 and as a justice on the Texas Supreme Court in 1991. He retired in 1995.

Gammage attempted a political comeback, seeking the Democratic nomination for governor in 2006. He lost in the primary to former U.S. Rep. Chris Bell, of Houston. In retirement in Llano in recent years, he did pro bono work for local clients and stayed interested in Democratic Party politics.

"My only regret," said his wife, Lynda, "was that he didn't cast his absentee vote for Obama."

Survivors include his wife of 32 years, Lynda Hallmark Gammage, of Llano; three children from a first marriage, Terry Lynne Gammage of Austin, Sara Noel Gammage Newman, of Georgetown, and Robert Alton Gammage Jr., of Austin, and a son from the second marriage, Sam Gammage, of San Antonio; a sister; and seven grandchildren.

A funeral will be held on Sept. 13 in the Senate Chamber at the Texas Capitol at 2 p.m., followed by burial at the Texas State Cemetery.